

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FOR NEA/EGY, FROM AMBASSADOR

E.O.11652:N/A
TAGS:TPHY, OSCI, EG
SUBJ: REQUEST FOR ASSESSMENT OF PROPOSED RESEARCH CONTRACT
(NIH) IRO1 MH 31516-01, "CODES OF HONOR & ASSOCIATED
RITUAL", PAIGE, KAREN E.

REF: (A) STATE A-1375 (B) STATE 92698

1. I HAVE REVIEWED SUBJ PROPOSAL ALONG WITH SCIATT AND
USAID. WE ARE NOT PREPARED TO QUESTION THE GENERAL
SCIENTIFIC VALUE OF THE PROPOSAL NOR QUALIFIED TO JUDGE
THE ADEQUACY OF ITS ASSUMPTIONS. WE CAN, IN FACT, SEE
SOME POSSIBLE INCIDENTAL BENEFIT IN TERMS OF ADDED
INFORMATION ON SOCIAL CUSTOMS AND SEXUAL PRACTICES
RELATED TO FERTILITY FOR POPULATION PROGRAMS. HOWEVER,
WE DO HAVE RESERVATIONS. THESE ARE:

A) (MOST IMPORTANTLY) FEMALE CIRCUMCISION, FIBULATION,
ETC. IS ILLEGAL (ALTHOUGH STILL TO BE FOUND) IN EGYPT.
MOH IS SENSITIVE TO THIS. A USG SPONSORED PROJECT IN
THIS AREA COULD BE CONSTRUED AS AN USG CRITICISM OF
MOH POLICY OR EFFECTIVENESS, OR PERHAPS DISTORTED INTO
AN ATTEMPT TO EMBARASS THE GOE, OR TO FOSTER AN ILLEGAL
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PRACTICE. (MINISTER BADRAN HAS SHOWN OCCASSIONAL
SENSITIVITY TO WHAT HE FEELS ARE "UNBALANCED" PRESENTATIONS
OR PUBLICITY ABOUT EGYPTIAN HEALTH AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS).
MFA ALMOST CERTAINLY WOULD SEE THIS AS A "USELESS", IF
NOT SENSITIVE, PROJECT.

B) THE SAMPLE SIZE AND DISTRIBUTION FOR THE FIRST PHASE
DOES NOT SEEM LARGE ENOUGH OR TO HAVE SUFFICIENT GEOGRA-

PHIC SPREAD TO INSURE ENOUGH INFORMATION TO DETERMINE IF FULL SCALE PROJECT COULD BE USEFULLY CARRIED OUT IN EGYPT. SAMPLES TAKEN IN CAIRO AND ONE CLOSEBY DELTA VILLAGE MIGHT NOT REFLECT UPPER EGYPT CONDITIONS; SIMILARLY "MIDDLE AND UPPER CLASS" WOMEN MAY NOT (AS THE PROPOSAL RECOGNIZES) BE WILLING TO DISCUSS, IN THE FIRST PERSON, A PRACTICE THAT MIGHT LINK THEM TO A "LOWER" CLASS OR MORE "PRIMITIVE" ORIGIN. HUSBANDS MIGHT ALSO BE SENSITIVE. CONVERSELY, THE LARGER THE PROJECT IS, THE MORE OPEN IT WOULD BE TO CRITICISM OR DISTORTION.

2. ALTHOUGH WE TEND TO BE NEGATIVE, WE CAN SEE SOME POSSIBLE VALUE HERE (OUTSIDE OF SIMPLY RESEARCH PAPERS). AS NOTED ABOVE, THE RESULTS MIGHT HELP THE GOE AND US IN BETTER UNDERSTANDING SOCIOECONOMIC AND PSYCHOLOGICAL PARAMETERS RELATED TO FERTILITY. THIS MIGHT BE HELPFUL IN DESIGNING EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS AND DEVELOPING METHODOLOGY USEFUL IN APPROACHING VILLAGE WOMEN. WE REALIZE, HOWEVER, THAT THIS IS NOT THE PURPOSE OF THE PROJECT.

3. ALSO, IF AL AZHAR AS AN INSTITUTION WERE TO APPROVE AND SUPPORT THE PROJECT, AS OPPOSED TO SIMPLY THE COOPERATION OF DR. SHAALAN (WHO IS FAVORABLY KNOWN TO US), IT MIGHT BE A USEFUL PRECEDENT IN FURTHERING LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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ACTIVITIES MORE DIRECTLY RELATED TO OUR OWN POPULATION PROGRAM INTERESTS. AL AZHAR IS A CONSERVATIVE ISLAMIC INSTITUTION. IF IT IS WILLING TO SUPPORT OBJECTIVE INVESTIGATIONS IN SENSITIVE, TRADITIONAL AREAS, HAVING SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ASPECTS, IT COULD BE A PLUS FOR OUR OWN INTERESTS.

4. AT THE SAME TIME, WE DON'T WANT TO GET CAUGHT IN ANY JURISTCTIONAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN AL AZHAR AND MOH. WE ALSO WONDER IF THIS PROPOSAL IS FOR PL-480 OR DIRECT DOLLAR GRANT FUNDING TO THE PAIGES? IF THE LATTER WE STILL WOULD WISH TO GET AN OK FROM MOH, AL AZHAR AND MFA; EVEN IF THE GRANT IS NOT TO AN EGYPTIAN INSTITUTION.

5. IN VIEW OF THE ABOVE I SUGGEST THE FOLLOWING: WE WILL INFORMALLY CONTACT DR. SHAALAN TO SEE WHAT FORMAL LINKS HE ENVISIONS WITH AL AZHAR. WE WILL ALSO CONTACT MFA. SUBJECT SHOULD ALSO BE RAISED WITH MOH INFORMALLY DURING COMING JWGMTC MTG., PARTICULARLY INTO QUESTION OF RESEARCH INTO A SENSITIVE, ILLEGAL PRACTICE. DEPENDING ON RESPONSES PROPOSAL MIGHT THEN BE DIRECTLY TAKEN UP

WITH AL-AZHAR.

6. MY OVERALL POSITION IS THAT WHILE DUBIOUS ABOUT THE
ACCEPTABILITY OF THE PROJECT AND ITS RELATIVE PRIORITY,
I DO NOT THINK IT MUST BE KILLED OUT OF HAND FOR
POLICY REASONS. THE SUBJECT IS NOT SO SENSITIVE THAT
IT CANNOT BE INFORMALLY EXPLORED WITH THE GOE AND ITS
VIEWS TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION IN MAKING A FINAL
DECISION. EILTS

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